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ABSTRACT

Due to challenging social conditions such as poverty, homelessness, illiteracy, unemployment, and drug abuse, teachers are faced with taking on new roles in order to meet students' needs. The roles of political activist, advocate, resource developer and manager, counselor, and vocational specialist are discussed in terms of their relationship to teachers of students with behavior disorders. Programs that prepare teachers of students with behavior disorders need to: (1) encourage and facilitate political activism among preservice teachers; (2) train students to become advocates; (3) emphasize resource development and management; (4) prepare teachers in therapeutic interventions appropriate for school settings; and (5) stress vocational and functional skill development through transition-oriented and community-based instruction. Along with the new roles for teachers, there need to come commensurately higher salaries, better working conditions, and improved status. (Contains 10 references.) (JDD)

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Preparing Future Teachers of Students with Behavior Disorders: New Roles and Challenges

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Running Head: NEW ROLES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Due to challenging social conditions such as, poverty, homelessness, illiteracy, unemployment, and drug abuse, teachers are faced with taking on new roles in order to meet students' needs. The roles of political activist, advocate, resource developer and manager, counselor, and vocational specialist are discussed in terms of their relationship to teachers of students with behavior disorders. Changes and additions to teacher preparation programs for professionals who will be educating students with behavior disorders are discussed.

Preparing Future Teachers of Students with Behavior Disorders: New Roles and Challenges

The social conditions that surround, influence, and are embedded in our school system are shaping student profiles. Poverty, homelessness, racism, despair, drug abuse, early pregnancy, illiteracy, school failures, unemployment, violence and crime are conditions with which many students are well aquainted (Schorr, 1989). Twenty-five percent of all homeless persons are children; the school dropout rate is 25%; 1.5 million teens become pregnant each year; the majority of all children are ethnic minorities (30% are African-American, 20% are Hispanic, and 4% each are Asian or Native American); fewer than 7% of all households consist of a working father, a housewife and two or more children (compared to 60% in 1955) (Marburger, 1990); and of all poor persons, 40% are children (Davis & McCaul, 1991).

Adolescents with behavior disorders are not immune to these societal conditions. Rather, the adolescent with a behavior disorder may possibly be more vulnerable to these conditions. In a recent study, Miller (1992) found that of 82 adolescents with behavior disorders surveyed, 57% had been sexually abused, 68% physically abused, 83% thought they might drop out of school soon, 68% reported high rates of skipping classes and truancy, and 38% reported having been beaten by their boyfriends or girlfriends.

The bleak statistics that describe societal conditions are but one indicator of the challenges faced by teachers today. Outcome studies in which the status of adolescents with behavior disorders has been examined present equally discouraging data on the effectiveness of current school programs for these

students. As early as 1983, Miller reported that five years after leaving a high school program for students with "serious emotional disturbances," 20% of the group were in prison; 50% were unemployed; 54% were not living independently (most lived with their families); and all of the young adults reported drug and alcohol problems, social relationship difficulties, and feeling lonely and unhappy. Comparisons with nondisabled students showed the students with disabilities fared the worst in all of these categories (Miller, 1983). More recently, research examining the post-high school status of students with behavior disorders has shown a population that is disenfranchised, unemployed, isolated, unhappy, and unfullfilled (Frank, Sitlington, & Carson, 1991; Neel, Meadows, Levine, & Edgar, 1988).

These negative outcomes need to be taken seriously. Only through a multifaceted, interagency approach, one that involves educational, health, and social services, as well as legal and policy-making systems, will effective programs for these adolescents become a reality. Education must play a major role in this quest for innovative programming, however, the teachers who will assist in the development and implementation of these programs will need to fill some new roles in response to these pressing current challenges.

New Challenges Require New Roles

While in the past it appeared that it was of primary concern to the teacher of students with behavior disorders to have a firm grounding in behavior management techniques, today these teachers have to be concerned with so much more than curriculum which includes control as the major component. In fact, the curriculum of control is not seen as the "best practice" anymore (Nichols, 1992). These

students' physical, mental, and social welfare is often placed squarely in the lap of their teachers.

To take on these challenges, the teacher of students with behavior disorders needs preparation in "best practices" which includes a variety of disciplines (e.g., psychology, social work, criminal law and justice, sociology), and a transdisciplinary, interagency social systems approach. While educators comprise only one part of the complex educational and social fabric, and, because of this, can only do so much in the face of these pressing societal conditions, they will need to address a number of these challenges in an effort to improve programs for students with behavior disorders.

Need for Political Activism

All of what goes on in schools is political, in a micro and macro sense of the word. Teachers of students need to be aware of the influence of politics and be openly encouraged, if not trained, to work in the political system for the elimination of poverty and social inequality. With poverty lessened or eliminated and social equality as a basic standard, students with behavior disorders (as well as many others) may stand a chance at living a quality and productive life. Often teacher preparation programs, as opposed to those in sociology, political science, law, or social work, have been politically inactive and noninvolved. Only when educators, along with the many professions concerned with the youth of our country, make an impact on the political system will the social system start to respond to these adolescents' very real needs. When the social system changes for the better, so will the outcomes improve for students with behavior disorders.

Need for Advocacy

Teachers of students with behavior disorders, as a progression of their heightened awareness of the social and political conditions, should be prepared to act as advocates for these students to secure services and appropriate programs. Compared to the systems serving students with developmental disabilities, services for students with behavior disorders are woefully inadequate in terms of options, resources, and personnel. Why is this so? Advocacy. In programs for other students it is very obvious that advocacy works. For example, students with developmental disabilities have historically had an enormous amount of powerful, organized, and effective advocacy provided by committed and active parents and professionals.

Teachers and other professionals working with students with behavior disorders need to recognize the importance of advocacy and of advocacy training. By becoming an advocate for these adolescents, either in supportive roles to parents, or in direct advocacy for students, teachers can become a force in marshalling the resources to meet these students' needs. In addition, a strong foundation of advocates for these adolescents can affect positive change in the political, social, and educational systems.

Need for Resource Knowledge and Management

Teachers of students with behavior disorders should be able to fill the role of a resource developer and broker. They need to understand service systems and be able to access them for the benefit of the students. To do this teachers must be experts in understanding what resources are available and be adept at "creative resourcing." Finding new ways to meet the needs of students and their families,

reorganizing resources so that they fit the mental and physical requirements of these students, and adapting the existing resource networks to meet the needs of these students are only a few examples of how skills in creative resourcing might be utilized.

In order to provide appropriate programs within the school and community, someone needs to coordinate, or "manage" the delivery of services. It is easy to say the "team" will do program or resource management, but it is also unrealistic. The teacher of students with behavior disorders is in a prime position to be the resource manager. Schools are the logical and most accessible "center" of the community and its resources. The teacher of students with behavior disorders should be prepared to organize and coordinate interagency teams, programs, and services.

Need for Therapeutic Training

Through a transdisciplinary approach, teachers of students with behavior disorders should be prepared to provide therapeutic interventions. For too long now the field has been fooling itself by de-emphasizing therapeutic intervention training and focusing on academics and behavior management in teacher preparation, when in reality the emotional, psychological, and familial needs of these students always take precedence. Educators are thrown into situations which call for the use of therapeutic interventions for which they have been ill-prepared. Many teachers of students with behavior disorders quickly realize the importance of a therapeutic preparation and search out further training in this area. However, many teachers are struggling to provide an appropriate environment but relying on a "curriculum of control" to do this (Nichols, 1992).

Need for Vocational Knowledge

In many ways, preparing students with behavior disorders to find and keep work is one of the most important responsibilities of school programs. Accessing economic fulfillment for these students should be the essence of any program designed for students with behavior disorders. Even if a special program has helped a student with behavior disorders develop a positive and strong self-concept during his/her school years, it will quickly degenerate if, after the completion of school, there is no means of economic support for that young adult in the community.

It is a difficult task to find work for adolescents who exhibit numerous behavior challenges. Employers find it easier to hire the student with a developmental disability who smiles and is nice to the customer, rather than the student who is sullen or downright disrespectful at times. Teachers of students with behavior disorders need training in developing appropriate prevocational curricula for these students, developing financial support mechanisms to insure that appropriate vocational preparation can be conducted, and gaining community support for pre- and vocational programs.

Recommendations

If teachers of students with behavior disorders are to take on these new roles and successfully negotiate the maze of new challenges, their preparation will need to:

1. ***Encourage and facilitate political activism among preservice teachers.*** Wise mentors who have experienced the challenge of working through the political system for change should assist preservice teachers in understanding

the process of political activism, and provide support as students experience the pitfalls and precarious nature of politics. Involvement in school change, curriculum committees, and case management will facilitate student growth in this type of activism.

2. *Train students to become advocates*. Advocacy skills can be incorporated into existing teacher preparation curricula to insure that future teachers understand the role of advocacy, have the ability to serve as advocates for their students when needed, and can train the students to advocate for themselves. Knowledge of resources, interagency agreements/relationships, policy/procedure making bodies, justifying and requesting resources, pressure from administration, job insecurity, and personal commitment are important training areas for advocates.

3. *Emphasize resource development and management.* Preparation programs should help teachers understand and gain access to the myriad of health, social, and psychological services available in rural and urban communities in order to help students and their families. More importantly, these preparation programs need to assist teachers in developing their creative, problem-solving abilities in order to maximize resources. In addition, future teachers need to learn how to manage multiple resources in interdisciplinary and interagency programs. Approaches such as critical thinking and inquiry (Ross & Hannay, 1986; Tom, 1985) will facilitate the growth of these creative and problem-solving in a teacher preparation curriculum.

4. *Prepare teachers in therapeutic interventions appropriate for school settings.* Many teachers of students with behavior disorders emerge from their professional preparation programs with little or no knowledge of

counseling and therapy. Teachers need more than behavior management skills and techniques. Teachers of adolescents with behavior disorders need to know how best to improve the self-esteem of their students, how to work with students who have been sexually or physically abused, how to empower adolescents to take charge of their lives, how to deal with suicidal behavior, and how to cope with dysfunctional family dynamics in therapeutic and beneficial ways. Currently, most teachers of students with behavior disorders act as teacher-counselors or teacher-therapists; yet, they haven't been trained for these roles. Teacher preparation programs must acknowledge that much of what these teachers do is provide a type of therapy, and take the responsibility to properly train teachers in successfully filling the role of teacher-counselor.

5. ***Stress vocational and functional skill development through transition oriented and community-based instruction.*** Teachers see the need for vocational training and are asked to prepare students with behavior disorders for jobs. In order to be successful at this and other related vocational skills, such as finding employment in the community and supervising students on the job, teachers need preparation in all of these areas. Teacher preparation programs for teachers of students with severe disabilities have long recognized the importance of teacher training in community-based employment and functional living skills. Teachers of students with behavior disorders need to receive similar training; preparation that emphasizes the importance of vocational and community living skills for students with behavior disorders.

Conclusion

Teacher preparation for these new roles will need to be transdisciplinary and interagency. No one person or discipline can do an adequate job of preparaing these future teachers in so many areas, just as no one teacher can meet all of the needs of students with behavior disorders. Although some of these roles are innovative and nontraditional, others, such as the vocational specialist role, are already given great support within other teacher preparation programs (e.g., teacher preparation in severe disabilities). We must look to other professional preparation programs that have successfully included these roles in their training and replicate the successful components of select programs. For example, among professionals working with students who have severe disabilities, it has long been recognized that advocacy, resource development, political work, and community-based instruction are essential components of school programs, as well as teacher preparation programs. We need to look to these innovators for ideas and support in our attempts at meeting the new challenges and roles facing teachers today.

Two important points. First, it is acknowledged that there are model teacher preparation programs in behavior disorders in the U. S. and abroad. An examination of special educational journals and documents reveals teacher preparation programs that utilize best practices and innovative approaches to produce effective teachers of students with behavior disorders. The author is not implying that these excellent programs do not exist. The suggestions here should only strengthen these programs while providing overall guiding principles for teacher preparation programs that are striving to excel in this area.

And lastly, but perhaps most importantly, it is a great deal to ask teachers who already face difficult working conditions, stressful school days, and low job status, to take on new roles and responsiblities. A critical aspect of the political activism and savy to be imparted to these future teachers is the importance of activism for their profession. Activism is needed in order to change the status of teachers, in particular those teachers of students with behavior disorders, as well as improve the student programs. Along with the new roles discussed, there needs to come commensurately higher salaries, better working conditions, and improved status. If these do not concomitantly occur with the change in roles, there will be no improvement for either teachers or students with behavior disorders.

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